

CIRCUIT AND METHOD FOR ACCURATELY APPLYING A VOLTAGE TO A NODE OF AN INTEGRATED CIRCUIT

Cross-reference to related applications

- 5 **[0001]** This application claims the benefit of United States Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/410,270 filed September 13, 2002.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the invention

- 10 **[0002]** The present invention generally relates to the design and testing of integrated circuits (ICs) , and, more specifically, to a method and circuit for accurately delivering DC or AC voltage to circuit nodes of integrated circuits.

Description of Related Art

- 15 **[0003]** Automatic Test Equipment (ATE) typically includes a parametric measurement unit (PMU) to measure the drive of an output pin of an IC, or to accurately deliver a DC voltage to an IC pin. The output drive of a pin is tested by applying a known current to the pin and measuring the resultant voltage at the pin, or by applying a known voltage and measuring the resultant current. **FIG. 1** shows a
- 20 simple IC **10**, having pins **12** and **14**, mounted on a device interface board **16** associated with test equipment **22**. A DC stimulus voltage **18** is accurately delivered to pin **12** of the IC by applying (forcing) the stimulus voltage via first conductive path **20** of test equipment **22**, and sensing the applied voltage via a second conductive path **24** of the test equipment. Typically, an operational amplifier **26** is
- 25 used to adjust the applied voltage until the sensed voltage is equal to the desired voltage. A capacitor **64** is typically included to improve the stability of the operational amplifier. The aforementioned conductive paths typically comprise wires, board-to-board interface connectors, and electro-mechanical relays **28**. **FIG. 2** illustrates a similar arrangement for testing a circuit **30** having differential pins **32**, **34**.
- 30 In this case, the arrangement uses a differential amplifier **36**. While these arrangements succeed in accurately delivering a desired voltage to an IC pin, it does not deliver the desired voltage to the circuit node of interest within the circuit. More specifically, the arrangements do not accommodate voltage drops which may occur between the IC pin and the node of interest. It also does not provide a way of
- 35 applying a high frequency voltage signal.

[0004] Saitoh United States Patent No. 6,397,361, granted on May 28, 2002, for "Reduced-pin-Integrated-Circuit I/O Test", describes force/measure paths of a tester which converge on a single FM (force/measure) pad of an IC under test. The pad is connected to a single, on-chip wire bus that is connected, via transmission gate switches, to other pins of the IC so that they may be tested without mechanically probing them. The tester forces a current and measures a voltage, or, alternatively, forces a voltage and measures a current. If the transmission gates have significant series impedance, for example comparable to the impedance of the pull-up resistance of the pin, then the pin cannot be accurately driven to a stimulus voltage because of the unknown voltage drop across the transmission gate. The patent also shows the addition of a second bus to allow access to differential pin pairs that are inputs to a differential receiver so that two pins can be driven simultaneously. Saitoh is not concerned with and does not provide a method of accurately delivering a voltage to a circuit node within the circuit.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0005] An objective of the present invention is to provide a method and a circuit for accurately delivering a voltage, DC or AC, to IC circuit nodes that have significant impedances to ground, via common buses and transmission gates that have significant series impedance.

[0006] A further objective of the present invention is to provide a method and a circuit for accurately delivering high frequency AC voltages to circuit nodes by applying a low frequency to a common bus and switching at a high frequency, at the circuit node, between a low frequency bus signal and some other signal.

[0007] The present invention also seeks to provide signal delivery in a way that is compliant with the IEEE 1149.1 and 1149.4 test access standards.

[0008] The test method of the present invention is applied to an IC that has at least two analog bus pins and on-chip buses connected thereto, and digitally-controlled transmission gates connecting the on-chip buses to a circuit node that is to be accurately driven to a stimulus voltage with the voltage originating in a tester having an operational amplifier, a voltage force path, a voltage sense path, and a capacitor between the force and sense paths; wherein the force path is connected to one of the on-chip buses, and the sense path is connected to another of the on-chip buses, and the transmission gates are selectably enabled to allow the force path connected bus and the sense path connected bus to each connect directly

to the circuit node. The voltage of the circuit node is driven so that the voltage detected via the sense path, becomes equal to the stimulus voltage. If a voltage stimulus having a high frequency that is too high to be conveyed via the on-chip bus is needed, then the transmission gates connected directly to the circuit node are
5 enabled periodically at the high frequency while the force path is driven with a low frequency voltage (including DC) and the sense path conveys this same low frequency.

[0009] One aspect of the present invention is generally defined as a method for accurately delivering a voltage to a circuit node of an integrated circuit having
10 analog buses and transmission gates selectively connecting the circuit node to the buses, comprising: sensing the voltage on the circuit node via a first of the buses under control of a first periodic signal; applying a first stimulus voltage to the circuit node via a second bus under control of a second periodic signal; applying a second stimulus voltage to the circuit node under control of a third periodic signal which is
15 inverted with respect to the second periodic signal so that the circuit node is driven alternately to the first stimulus voltage and to the second stimulus voltage.

[0010] Another aspect of the present invention is generally defined as a circuit for accurately delivering a first stimulus voltage to one or more circuit nodes of an IC, the circuit comprising switching means, within the IC, for conveying a force
20 voltage to one of the circuit nodes; switching means, within the IC, for conveying a sense voltage from the one of the circuit nodes; amplifier means for adjusting the force voltage to cause the sense voltage to equal the stimulus voltage; storage means for storing a voltage difference between the force voltage and the sense voltage; and means for selectively simultaneously enabling both of the switching
25 means to enable the first stimulus voltage to be delivered to the one of the circuit nodes.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

These and other features of the invention will become more apparent from the following description in which reference is made to the appended drawings in which:

5 **[0011]** **FIG. 1** is a prior art schematic of a tester stimulus signal source that has force/sense;

[0012] **FIG. 2** is a prior art schematic of a tester stimulus signal source for differential pins and that has force/sense;

[0013] **FIG. 3** is a circuit schematic of a tester signal source connected to an
10 integrated circuit that has two analog buses and transmission gates connected to circuit nodes and a switch control circuit according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0014] **FIG. 4** is a more detailed circuit schematic of a switch control circuit according to an embodiment of the present invention;

15 **[0015]** **FIG. 5** illustrates clock waveforms of signals applied to high frequency clock inputs of the switch control circuit, according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

[0016] **FIG. 6** is a prior art architecture of 1149.4-compliant IC;

[0017] **FIG. 7** is a prior art schematic of a typical 1149.4 boundary module
20 and test bus interface circuit;

[0018] **FIG. 8** is a schematic of a tester signal source connected to an IC that has two analog buses, and an on-chip force/sense operational amplifier, according to an embodiment of the invention;

[0019] **FIG. 9** is a schematic of a high frequency stimulus circuit that has a
25 low frequency analog bus and high frequency switching at the circuit node under test; and

[0020] **FIG. 10** is a schematic of a circuit for applying two stimulus signals to a circuit node of interest.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION

[0021] In the following detailed description, numerous specific details are set forth in order to provide a thorough understanding of the present invention, However, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that the present invention
5 may be practiced without these specific details. In other instances, well known methods, procedures, components and circuits have not been described in detail so as not to obscure aspects of the present invention.

[0022] As mentioned earlier, a primary objective of the present invention is to accurately deliver a stimulus voltage to a circuit node, which may be a bond pad of
10 an integrated circuit and which may have significant impedance to ground, via a common bus so that mechanical connection to the circuit node is unnecessary. A further objective is to provide means for accurately delivering a stimulus voltage that has a frequency that is too high for the common bus. Another objective is facilitating reduced pin count access to an IC during manufacturing test of the IC.

[0023] FIG. 3 illustrates an integrated circuit 50 mounted on a device
15 interface board 52 associated with tester 22. The circuit has a circuit node 54 that is to be accurately driven to a stimulus voltage. The circuit also has terminals 56 and 58 which connect to terminals of the tester via terminals of the interface board. As previously described with reference to FIG. 1, a stimulus voltage 18 originates in
20 tester 22 and is applied to one input of op-amp 26. The output of the op-amp is connected to circuit pin 58 and defines a voltage force path 60. Circuit pin 56 is connected to the other input of op-amp 26 to define a voltage sense path 62. A capacitor 64 is provided between force path 60 and sense path 62 and is used by the present invention for storing a voltage difference between the force voltage and
25 the sense voltage.

[0024] IC 50 is provided with on-chip analog buses 70 and 72, preferably, analog buses as described in the IEEE 1149.4 standard. Pins 56 and 58 are bus access pins AT1, AT2, described later, which are connected to on-chip buses 70 and 72 by switches 74 provided by a Test Bus Interface Circuit (TBIC). Circuit node 54,
30 that is to be accurately driven to a stimulus voltage, is connected to each of analog buses 70 and 72 by means of digitally-controlled transmission gates 80. Transmission gates 74 and 80 are selectably enabled to allow force path connected bus 72 and sense path connected bus 70 to each connect directly to circuit node 54.

[0025] The series impedance of transmission gates **74** and **80** does not affect the accuracy of the delivered signal if the force voltage in force path **60** provided by the tester does not exceed the maximum voltage tolerated by the IC. For example, if the series impedance is 1000 ohms, the circuit node's impedance to ground is 1000 ohms, and the maximum stimulus voltage tolerated is 4 volts, then the maximum voltage that can be delivered to the circuit node is 2 volts.

[0026] Each of transmission gates **80** is enabled by a bit in a digital shift register element (not shown), which, in a preferred embodiment of the present invention, is part of an 1149.1 boundary scan register (BSR). The present invention provides a switch control circuit **100**, shown in more detail in **FIG. 7**, which combines BSR bit values with a clock signal to provide accurate delivery of a low or high frequency voltage to circuit node **54**.

[0027] In general, the present invention provides a circuit for accurately delivering a first stimulus voltage to one or more circuit nodes of an IC. The circuit comprises switching means, within the IC, for conveying a force voltage to one of the circuit nodes; switching means, within the IC, for conveying a sense voltage from the one of the circuit nodes; amplifier means for adjusting the force voltage to cause the sense voltage to equal the stimulus voltage; storage means for storing a voltage difference between the force voltage and the sense voltage; and means for selectively simultaneously enabling both of the switching means to enable the first stimulus voltage to be delivered to the one of the circuit nodes. The amplifier means and/or the storage means may be on the IC or on a tester.

[0028] Referring to **FIG. 4**, transmission gates **80** comprise a first switching means in the form of a first transmission gate **82** which has an input connected to circuit node **54**, an output connected to bus **70**, and a control input **84** connected to control circuit **100**, a second switching means in the form of a transmission gate **86** which has an output connected to circuit node **54** and an input connected to bus **72**, and a control input **88** connected to control circuit **100**, and a third switching means in the form of a transmission gate **90** which has an output connected to circuit node **54**, an input connected to a voltage source path **94**, and a control input **92** connected to control circuit **100**.

[0029] Switch control circuit **100** serves to selectively simultaneously enable both of the switching means to enable the first stimulus voltage to be delivered to the circuit node and includes means for combining a BSR bit and a clock signal for

producing a transmission gate control signal for the transmission gates associated with the voltage force and sense paths. In one embodiment, the combining means is in the form of AND gates **102** and **104**. Gate **102** combines a BSR bit and a clock signal, *HFclk_d*, for generating control signal **84** for transmission gate **82** associated with voltage sense path **62**. Gate **104** combines a BSR bit and a clock signal, *HFclk*, for generating control signal **88** for transmission gate **86** associated with voltage force path **60**. A clock signal, *HFclk_b*, is applied to control input **92** of third transmission gate **90**. It will be understood by those skilled in the art that other logic gates and/or circuits may be used to generate the transmission gate control signals. As described below, the control circuit may be controlled to stimulate circuit node **54** to either a low frequency or DC voltage or a high frequency voltage.

[**0030**] The above described circuit can be used for accurately delivering a voltage to a circuit node of an integrated circuit by sensing the voltage on the circuit node via a first bus under control of a first periodic signal, applying a first stimulus voltage to the circuit node via a second bus under control of a second periodic signal, applying a second stimulus voltage to the circuit node under control of a third periodic signal which is inverted with respect to the second periodic signal so that the circuit node is driven alternately to the first stimulus voltage and to the second stimulus voltage.

[**0031**] To stimulate circuit node **54** with a low frequency voltage, high frequency clocks *HFclk* and *HFclk_d* are set to be continuously logic 1 to enable the force and sense paths, and *HFclk_b* is set continuously to logic 0 to disable DC voltage (or low frequency signal) path **94**. Circuit node **54** is accessed by shifting in BSR bits that enable force and sense path access switches **86** and **82**, respectively, via AND gates **104** and **102**. Thus, the low frequency stimulus voltage **18** is applied to an input of operational amplifier (op-amp) **26**. The output of op-amp **26** forces circuit node **54** to stimulus voltage **18** via force path **60**, based on negative feedback via sense path **62**, regardless of the voltage drop across switch **86** caused by current flowing from the op-amp output through switch **86** to node **54** and impedance **55** to ground.

[**0032**] To stimulate a circuit node **54** with a high frequency voltage, periodic high frequency clock signals are applied to the *HFclk_d*, *HFclk*, and *HFclk_b* inputs. In general, the three clock signals have the same frequency — the frequency of the

desired voltage signal to be applied to the circuit node. However, signal **HFclkb** is inverted relative to **HFclk** and its active time region is non-overlapping with respect to the active time region of **HFclk** so that the circuit node is never driven simultaneously by the force path 60 and DC voltage path 94.

5 **[0033]** **FIG. 5** shows preferred waveforms for **HFclkd**, **HFclk**, and **HFclkb**. As shown, **HFclk** is a force voltage clock signal having a frequency that is the desired stimulus frequency for the accessed circuit node. **HFclkd** is a sense voltage clock signal which is preferably timed so that its leading (rising) edge is delayed relative to the leading edge of **HFclk**, and its trailing (falling) edge is simultaneous
10 with the corresponding edge of **HFclk**. The delayed leading edge ensures that sense feedback path 62 is not activated until force path 60 has had sufficient time to drive the circuit node to the present value of low frequency stimulus voltage 18. The trailing edges are simultaneous to ensure that the voltage present across capacitor 64 after the switches are deactivated is as equal as possible to the voltage that was
15 present while the switches were enabled. Waveform **HFclkb** is inverted relative to the waveform **HFclk**, and its active time region is preferably non-overlapping with the active time region of **HFclk**, so that, as already mentioned, the circuit node is never driven simultaneously by the force path 60 and DC voltage path 94.

20 **[0034]** To stimulate a differential pair of circuit nodes, the circuitry of **FIG. 3** and **4** can be simply duplicated for each pin of the differential pair, so as to provide a pair of force paths and a pair of sense paths. Thus, the number of analog bus pins becomes four instead of the two described in the 1149.4 standard.

25 **[0035]** As previously mentioned, the present invention also seeks to provide signal delivery in a way that is compliant with the 1149.1 and 1149.4 test access standards. As the pin-count of new ICs increases each year, and the cost of high pin-count testers increases, it becomes necessary to consider reduced pin-count testing where only a small subset of an IC's pins are contacted during IC testing. The un-contacted pins are then tested via boundary scan circuitry that controls every pin. The preferred way, in industry, to implement digital boundary scan is according
30 to the rules defined in the "IEEE Standard Test Access Port and Boundary-Scan Architecture", published in 1990 and 2001, by the Institute for Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE), which is also known as IEEE Std. 1149.1-2001, or simply 1149.1. Another standard entitled "IEEE Standard for a Mixed Signal Test Bus", was published in 1999 by the IEEE, and is known as IEEE Std. 1149.4-1999,

or simply 1149.4. The general architecture of an IC designed according to 1149.4 is shown in **FIG. 6**.

[0036] **FIG. 6** illustrates a circuit **110** having analog circuitry **112**, digital circuitry **114** and input/output (I/O) pins **116**. I/O pins **116** are associated with
5 boundary scan cells or modules **118** which can be configured to form a shift register to allow data to be shifted into and out of the cells, along a shift path **120** between a test data input pin **TDI** and a test data output pin **TDO**, under control of a Test Access Port (TAP) controller **122**. The circuit also includes a pair of analog buses **AB1** and **AB2** to each of which 1149.4 boundary scan modules can be selectively
10 connected. The analog buses can be selectively connected to external buses via pins **AT1** and **AT2** under control of a Test Bus Interface circuit (TBIC) **124**.

[0037] **FIG. 7** illustrates related portions of an analog boundary module **118** and TBIC **124** associated with buses **AB1** and **AB2**. The boundary scan modules include latches **132** and **134** whose contents control digitally controlled switches **136** and **138**, respectively, each of which, in turn, connect one of the buses to the pad of
15 pin **116** with which the module is associated. TBIC **124** also includes digitally controlled switches **140** and **142** which connect buses **AB1** and **AB2** to pins **AT1** and **AT2** as shown and as is well known in the art.

[0038] The capabilities of this test bus have been described in several
20 published papers, including a paper entitled "Design, Fabrication, and Use of Mixed-Signal IC Testability Structures" by K. Parker et al, published in the Proceedings of the 1997 International Test Conference (ITC). This test bus was primarily designed to permit the measurement of discrete passive components, including capacitors and resistors, that are connected to the pins of ICs. It is
25 intended for applying a stimulus current or voltage to a pin, via one of the test buses, and simultaneously monitoring the pin's response voltage via the other of the test buses, and to thus determine the impedance of a circuit that has been connected to the pin.

[0039] Capacitor **64**, shown in **FIG. 1, 3 and 8**, may exist within the tester,
30 on the device interface board, or within the IC. The capacitance value chosen is preferably based on the clock frequency and the frequency of the stimulus. For example, 50 pF is suitable for 100 MHz clocking and 10 kHz stimulus. A higher value of capacitance can be used for lower clock frequencies.

[0040] For clarity, only one accessed circuit node **54** has been shown in **FIG. 3, 6, 7** and **8**. However, many circuit nodes may be connected to analog buses **70, 72**. Similarly, the IC may contain many buses, especially if the access nodes have different voltage ranges or frequency ranges, or if there are a large number of circuit nodes to access. This is especially pertinent when the access nodes are pins of the IC.

[0041] In another embodiment of the invention, illustrated in **FIG. 8**, an op-amp **150** that provides the force/sense action is implemented into the IC that contains the accessed circuit node. This reduces the capacitance of the access buses considerably, and also permits a lower value feedback capacitance, both of which permit higher frequency operation.

[0042] The present invention is particularly useful when used in conjunction with the invention described and claimed in Applicant's United States Patent No. 6,492,798 granted on December 10, 2002 for "Method and Circuit for Testing High Frequency Mixed Signal Circuits with Low Frequency Signals", incorporated herein by reference. The patent describes a circuit and method of applying high frequency stimulus voltage to a circuit node. As shown in **FIG. 9**, circuit **160** conveys only a low frequency signal on an analog bus **162** to circuit node **164** and provides switching means **166** at the circuit node that switches between the voltage on bus **162** and the voltage of another low frequency signal (possibly DC) **168**.

[0043] **FIG. 10** schematically illustrates a circuit which may be employed to implement the method of testing high frequency mixed signal circuits with low frequency signals. **FIG. 10** shows a circuit node **180** to which it is desired to apply two stimulus signals according to the invention described and claimed in the aforementioned application. The circuit includes two pairs of buses **182** and **184** which provide force/sense paths **186, 188** for each of the stimulus signals between the circuit node of interest and respective op-amps **190, 192**, with each force/sense path having respective transmission gates **194, 196**, and control circuits corresponding to transmission gates **80** and control circuits **100**, respectively, described earlier. The force/sense paths include respective capacitors **202, 204** which serve as storage means for storing a voltage difference between the force voltage and the sense voltage. The op-amps and capacitors may both reside on chip, or one op-amp may reside on chip and other on a tester, or both may reside off chip.

[0044] Although the present invention has been described in detail with regard to preferred embodiments and drawings of the invention, it will be apparent to those skilled in the art that various adaptations, modifications and alterations may be accomplished without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention.

- 5 Accordingly, it is to be understood that the accompanying drawings as set forth hereinabove are not intended to limit the breadth of the present invention, which should be inferred only from the following claims and their appropriately construed legal equivalents.